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## Survey Finds Hood Canal in Troubled Waters

- More than 60 percent of homeowners in the area feel some responsibility for solving the problem.

By Christopher Dunagan, [cdunagan@kitsapsun.com](mailto:cdunagan@kitsapsun.com)  
December 19, 2005

A survey of 881 Hood Canal residents found that many homeowners would be willing to contribute financially if it would help save the waterway.

"The most significant finding is that there is a high level of stewardship among shoreline and watershed residents. They're willing to spend money to help fix the sewage problems," said Dave Christensen, the study's author.

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Christensen, water quality program manager for Hood Canal Coordinating Council, is pressing forward under a \$120,000 grant to organize small communities where local sewage-treatment systems could be cost-effective.

Over the past several years, fish and other sea creatures have been struggling to survive in waters depleted of oxygen. Scientists are working to discover the problem's cause, but excess nitrogen is considered to be a major factor. Nitrogen in Hood Canal comes from various sources, but the primary suspect is a large number of septic systems in the watershed.

According to Christensen's survey, conducted last spring, 88 percent of the homeowners were aware of the low-oxygen problem. Less than 10 percent of those surveyed called it "not a big problem."

More than 60 percent said they felt at least some responsibility to take action to solve the problem, with that number climbing to about 85 percent among waterfront property owners.

Asked if they would voluntarily join a sewage

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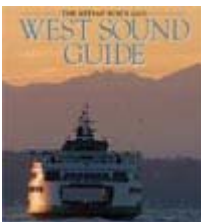
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management cooperative if the cost were \$20 a month, 6 percent said they "definitely would," 37 percent said "maybe, need more information," 21 percent said "probably not," 12 percent said "definitely not," and 12 percent weren't sure. Waterfront property owners expressed a greater willingness to make that commitment than upland property owners.

Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed thought it would cost less than \$5,000 to upgrade their own septic system, whereas the actual cost is likely to run between \$5,000 and \$30,000, depending on the site, Christensen said.

If given the option of upgrading their own failing system or joining a community system, most people would choose the community system, he added.

"The conventional wisdom has been to find failing systems and fix them," he said. "Now people are finding site restrictions and realizing that might not be a good long-term solution."

Christensen has been meeting with residents of the Clifton Beach area, which includes as many as 80 homes on the North Shore of Hood Canal outside of Belfair, as well as Paradise Bay, which includes about 100 homes north of the Hood Canal Bridge. Homeowners in those areas have shown interest in a community system that would treat sewage and remove nitrogen. Christensen is helping the residents explore alternatives.

Areas where discussions may take place in the future include Union in southern Hood Canal and Ayock Beach, south of the Hamma Hamma River on the canal's west side.

The homeowner survey and community effort is funded with a grant from the Washington Department of Ecology, Puget Sound Action Team and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

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